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Twenty-first semi-annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

I. Background

1. The present report is my twenty-first semi-annual report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). It provides a review and an assessment of the process of the implementation of the resolution since my previous report on the subject, which was issued on 7 October 2014 (S/2014/720). I note herein the continued lack of progress on key provisions of the resolution and highlight increasing concerns about pressure on the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon. On 19 March, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2015/7) in which, among other things, it urged all parties to reflect positively on ways forward on all outstanding issues in the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1559 (2004), and expressed concern at violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, the stalemate in the election of Lebanon's President, the impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Lebanon's security and stability, and condemned acts of terrorism that have taken place in Lebanon. In the statement, the President of the Council also commended the role of the Lebanese Armed Forces in defending Lebanon's sovereignty, and welcomed the renewal of the mandate of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

2. As I stated in my report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2015/147), on 28 January, Hizbullah launched several anti-tank guided missiles from the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) towards an Israeli military convoy south of the Blue Line, which resulted in the deaths of two Israeli soldiers and injured several other soldiers and civilians. In the retaliatory fire by the Israel Defense Forces, a UNIFIL peacekeeper was killed. Both of those incidents are in serious violation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). At the time of the incident, I condemned all violence and called upon all concerned to exercise maximum calm and restraint, to refrain from any action that could undermine the stability of the area and to act responsibly to prevent any escalation in an already tense regional environment.

3. The position of President of Lebanon has been vacant for almost one full year. While recognizing the efforts of the Prime Minister, Tammam Salam, and the Government in governing Lebanon throughout this difficult period, I am

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increasingly concerned at both the lack of progress in electing a new president and the impact on Lebanon of such a prolonged vacuum. The Parliament has been called into session to elect a president on 20 separate occasions since the position became vacant on 25 May 2014, but it has failed to convene on the issue owing to the lack of a quorum. Within that context, I note constraints on activity within the Cabinet brought about largely by the vacuum. On 5 November, however, the Parliament did meet to agree on the extension of its own mandate until June 2017.

4. The war in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to have a significant impact on Lebanon's security and stability. On 24 October 2014, clashes between militant groups and the national armed forces in the northern city of Tripoli resulted in four fatalities and dozens of injuries. On 10 January, a twin suicide bomb attack on a café in the Jabal Mohsen area of Tripoli killed at least nine people, including a member of the internal security forces, and injured 37 others. Other terrorist attacks included two car bombs on 3 and 8 December in the area of Aarsal, which also caused death and injury. The armed forces and security services have detained a number of individuals involved in security incidents as part of their security operations in Tripoli, the Bekaa and southern suburbs of Beirut. Under the auspices of the Speaker of Parliament, Nabih Berri, dialogue between representatives of the Future Movement and Hizbullah began on 23 December 2014 and has continued over six sessions to date. The existence of the dialogue has contributed to a reduction in tensions between Lebanon's Sunni and Shia communities.

5. The national armed forces have continued to face challenges to Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They have responded effectively and have contributed to a decrease in the overall number of cross-border incidents in Lebanon's northern and eastern border areas during the reporting period. Nonetheless, a significant threat to Lebanon's security from forces fighting across the border in the Syrian Arab Republic remains, in particular from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Jabhat al-Nusra (Nusra Front) and other extremist elements.

6. Lebanon continues to host the largest number of refugees per capita in the world, with 1,168,000 registered refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic. On 28 October, the Government of Germany hosted a ministerial meeting in Berlin of the International Support Group for Lebanon, within the context of a wider conference on Syrian refugees in the broader Middle East region. The group recognized the burden on Lebanon of dealing with such an unprecedented number of refugees and the need for greater international assistance and burden-sharing. On 15 December, the Government of Lebanon launched its crisis response plan for 2015-2016, a joint initiative with the United Nations to meet the humanitarian, protection and socioeconomic needs of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees and host communities in the country. Harsh winter weather has caused conditions that have tragically led to a number of deaths from hypothermia in the refugee community. Separately, the Government of Lebanon also introduced a set of measures on 31 December to restrict the flow of refugees into the country and better manage the refugee presence. The United Nations continues to work closely with the Government of Lebanon on mobilizing support for its crisis response plan and on the provision of greater assistance to the most vulnerable refugees affected by the crisis.

II. Implementation of resolution 1559 (2004)

7. Since the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004) on 2 September 2004, several of its provisions have been implemented, as I highlighted in my previous reports. Presidential and parliamentary elections were conducted freely and fairly in 2008 and 2009. The Syrian Arab Republic withdrew its troops and military assets from Lebanon in April 2005. Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic established full diplomatic relations in 2009.

8. During the reporting period, the Prime Minister continued to affirm Lebanon's respect for all United Nations resolutions. The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and its corresponding impact on Lebanon, however, continued to limit progress in the implementation of the outstanding provisions of resolution 1559 (2004) and other resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.

9. The delineation of the Syrian-Lebanese border, which was strongly encouraged by the Security Council in its resolution 1680 (2006), remains pending. Moreover, the existence and activities of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias along the border continue to pose a threat to the stability of the country and the region. The national armed forces have deployed several regiments on the eastern border, increasing the presence of State authority in the border areas. I welcome that positive development and continue to highlight the need for the Government and the armed forces to continue to step up their efforts to provide stability and for the international community to continue to support such efforts. The State must achieve a full monopoly on the possession of weapons and the use of force throughout Lebanon.

10. My representatives and I remained in regular contact with all parties in Lebanon during the reporting period, as well as with relevant regional and international leaders. I met the Prime Minister on 31 March on the margins of the Kuwait donor conference and noted the additional challenges that Lebanon faced as a result of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, including the impact on political, security and economic life. I underlined the importance of putting aside partisan politics and electing a new president without delay, as called for by the Security Council, so that Lebanon would be fully capable of making necessary and urgent decisions on matters relating to the security and stability of the country. The Deputy Secretary-General met with the Speaker of Parliament and the Prime Minister, as well as with Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rahi, during his visit to Lebanon from 14 to 17 December 2014. In the context of the launch of the Lebanon crisis response plan for 2015-2016, the Deputy Secretary-General highlighted the importance of electing a new president without further delay. He also noted the continued impact on Lebanon of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, including in respect of Syrian refugees and the host communities supporting them.

A. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon

11. With the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council aimed at strengthening the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout the country, in line with the Taif Accords of 1989, to which all the political parties in Lebanon had committed themselves. This objective has remained

the highest priority of my efforts to facilitate the implementation of all resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.

12. I am increasingly concerned by the continued failure to elect a new president. With the mandate of the former President having ended almost one year ago the country has become increasingly vulnerable in the face of continuing security, economic and humanitarian challenges. The Prime Minister and his Government have worked to ensure the continuity of State institutions in the absence of a president, but this has become increasingly difficult. While the Parliament has been called into session on numerous occasions since 24 May 2014, it has failed to convene to elect a new president because of the lack of a quorum, specifically the absence of parliamentarians from Hizbullah and the Free Patriotic Movement. However, as I indicated earlier in the present report, it did agree to extend its mandate until 20 June 2017.

13. I note that the renewed dialogue, under the auspices of the Speaker of Parliament, and held with representatives of the Future Movement and Hizbullah, has led to progress in reducing tensions and providing political cover for security operations against militants and criminals in various locations around the country, although it has not yet made progress on a mechanism to help the parties overcome the deadlock and move forward on electing a new president. In the interest of all Lebanese communities and Lebanon's standing regionally and internationally, I call upon all Lebanese politicians to meet to elect a new president without further delay.

14. In its resolution 1680 (2006), the Security Council strongly encouraged the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to respond positively to the request of the Government of Lebanon to delineate their common border. I continue to call upon the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to achieve the full delineation of their common border. Given the continuing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, however, progress has been even more difficult to achieve and no tangible steps were taken by either side in that regard during the reporting period.

15. The delineation and demarcation of the boundaries of Lebanon remain elements essential to guaranteeing national sovereignty and territorial integrity. They also remain critical to facilitating proper border control. The complex security situation along the Syrian-Lebanese border in the current circumstances, including continuing reports of cross-border fighting and movements of arms and people, further underlines the urgency of demarcating the border. While acknowledging the bilateral nature of border delineation, progress on the matter remains an obligation of the two countries, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 1680 (2006) and 1559 (2004).

16. Cross-border violations of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity have continued on the eastern and northern borders as a direct result of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. During the reporting period, there has been a decrease in the number of cross-border events, but there were at least 45 cross-border shooting incidents, 7 incidents of cross-border-shelling and 16 rocket attacks from the Syrian side of the border. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has also continued to conduct air raids, in violation of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity. The incidents caused injuries and material damage.

17. Security personnel, including members of the national armed forces and internal security forces, who were kidnapped and taken hostage in August 2014

during an incursion of armed men belonging to the Nusra Front and ISIL, have still not been released. Since their kidnapping, four have been executed by their captors; the latest death was announced on 5 December 2014. Efforts to secure the release of the remaining hostages are ongoing.

18. The continued occupation by Israel of the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line stands in violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). My representatives and I continue to engage closely with both parties with a view to facilitating the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from the area, pursuant to resolution 1701 (2006).

19. There was no progress in relation to the issue of the Shab'a Farms area during the reporting period. Neither the Syrian Arab Republic nor Israel has yet responded with regard to the provisional definition of the area contained in my report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), issued on 30 October 2007 (S/2007/641).

20. Unmanned aerial vehicles and fixed-wing aircraft, including fighter jets, of the Israel Defense Forces continued to make almost daily overflights of Lebanon during the reporting period, in violation of Lebanese sovereignty and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). The Government of Lebanon has regularly and repeatedly protested against the violations. I have deplored them and demanded that they cease immediately. The Israeli authorities, in turn, claim that the overflights are carried out for security reasons.

B. Extension of control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory

21. The Government of Lebanon has reiterated to the United Nations its intention to extend State authority over all Lebanese territory, as called for in the Taif Accords and in resolution 1559 (2004). The national armed forces and internal security forces have played a crucial role in implementing that commitment under difficult circumstances and the ability of the Lebanese State to fully exercise its authority over all its territory continues to be challenged.

22. Concern remains at the involvement of Lebanese fighters in the Syrian conflict, including members of Hizbullah. Hizbullah has continued to publicly acknowledge its participation in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic, contrary to its commitment to the Baabda Declaration and Lebanon's policy of disassociation. Funerals of its members killed in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to be held in Lebanon during the reporting period. Other Lebanese have also participated in the fighting across the border in the Syrian Arab Republic alongside Syrian opposition forces and also reportedly for the Nusra Front and ISIL. The involvement of Hizbullah and other Lebanese elements in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic further jeopardizes the stability and security of Lebanon.

23. The national armed forces have deployed border regiments on the northern and eastern borders of the country. The deployment has repelled attempted incursions of Lebanese territory by armed fighters on several occasions. However, on 1 December, during one of those attempts, six Lebanese soldiers were killed and one was injured near the town of Ras Baalbek. In another such incident, on 23 January,

clashes with armed fighters in the same area led to the death of eight soldiers and the injury of a number of others.

24. Urgent international support of the national armed forces remains a priority. The delivery of assistance related to the contribution of $3 billion from Saudi Arabia, announced in March 2014, is expected to begin imminently in cooperation with France. The additional donation of $1 billion by Saudi Arabia to Lebanon for specifically engaging in counter-terrorism activities has further bolstered the capacity of the armed forces and security services in that regard. Bilateral security assistance by the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and other Member States has also helped to strengthen the capability of the armed forces.

25. Owing to the efforts of the national armed forces and security agencies, and the increased cooperation between them, there has been an overall decrease in the number of terrorist incidents in the country. However, on 3 December, a Lebanese soldier was killed and two others injured when they attempted to defuse a bomb close to the outskirts of the town of Aarsal. On 8 December, also in Aarsal, a car bomb exploded injuring at least three. On 10 January, a double suicide bomb attack in the largely Alawite neighbourhood of Jabal Mohsen caused nine fatalities, including one member of the internal security forces, and injured 37. The Nusra Front claimed responsibility for that attack, which received broad condemnation from across Lebanon's political spectrum.

26. Security operations have been carried out throughout the country with specific plans implemented in Aarsal, Tripoli, the Bekaa area and southern suburbs of Beirut, leading to the detention of some extremists and criminals. In addition, on 12 January, the internal security forces conducted an unprecedented security operation aimed at disrupting a terrorist communication network in Roumieh prison.

27. With regard to the border of Lebanon with the Syrian Arab Republic, there continued to be reports of arms trafficking in both directions. The Government of Israel has consistently alleged, including in a letter dated 12 December addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2014/878), that there are ongoing arms transfers to Hizbullah across the Lebanese-Syrian border. Although the United Nations is not in a position to independently verify those concerns, it takes such reports seriously. Hizbullah has continued to openly claim that it has a substantial and sophisticated military capacity which is separate from that of the Lebanese State and which it claims serves as a deterrent against potential aggression from Israel.

28. On 18 January, an alleged Israeli airstrike in the Golan Heights killed six Hizbullah members and a high-ranking Iranian military officer. At the time of the incident I expressed concern about the potential consequences of such an episode, particularly in the context of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the corresponding impact on Lebanon. I called upon all sides to act responsibly to prevent any further escalation in respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all of the countries concerned.

29. In view of the continuing cross-border incidents and the reports of arms smuggling, there remains an urgent need to improve the management and control of Lebanon's land borders. Tackling that challenge is also necessary in order to prevent armed groups and militias in Lebanon from expanding their arsenals of weapons,

given that such expansion outside State control constitutes a threat to national and regional peace.

C. Disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias

30. In its resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council called for the disarming and disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, a key provision of the resolution that has not yet been implemented. It reflects and reaffirms a decision to which all Lebanese committed themselves in the Taif Accords, which led at the time to Lebanese militias, with the exception of Hizbullah, relinquishing their weapons. Given the current national context and the growing impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon, it is critical that the Accords be preserved and implemented by all in order to avoid the spectre of a renewed confrontation among the Lebanese and to strengthen the institutions of the State.

31. Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias within the country continue to operate outside the control of the Government, in serious violation of resolution 1559 (2004). While several groups across the political spectrum in Lebanon possess weapons outside government control, the armed component of Hizbullah is the most significant and most heavily armed Lebanese militia in the country. The maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other groups poses a serious challenge to the State's ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. In addition, several Palestinian armed groups continue to operate in the country inside and outside the refugee camps.

32. There has been no tangible progress towards the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, as called for in the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004). Since the adoption of that resolution, no specific steps have been taken to tackle that crucial issue, which lies at the heart of the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon. Several Lebanese groups and individuals continue to speak up against the maintenance by Hizbullah of a military arsenal and the presence of armed groups such as the "Seraya al-Muqawama", which they consider to be a destabilizing factor in the country and a factor that undermines democracy. Many Lebanese see the continued existence of such arms as an implicit threat for use within Lebanon for political reasons.

33. I have repeatedly expressed my deep concern to Lebanese leaders about the serious risks that armed groups pose to the stability of the country and the region. I have urged them to tackle the matter without further delay, given that it is their obligation under Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). In a democratic State, it is a fundamental anomaly that a political party maintains its own militia. Nonetheless, Hizbullah has continued to openly claim that its military capacity is separate from that of the Lebanese State and that its arms serve as a deterrent against potential aggression from Israel.

34. In its statement, in which it claimed responsibility for the 28 January attack against an Israeli military convoy, Hizbullah attributed the action to its "Quneitra martyrs group" in reference to the 18 January alleged Israeli airstrike on the Golan. Israel retaliated against Lebanon on 28 January, firing mortar rounds and artillery into the areas of Arab el Louaize, near Ghajar, Majidiye and Kafr Chouba (in sector east of the UNIFIL area of operations). During the course of Israeli retaliatory fire a UNIFIL peacekeeper was killed in position 4-28. There were further retaliations

from both sides, the details of which were set out in my previous report on resolution 1701 (2006).

35. The claim of responsibility by Hizbullah for the attack across the Blue Line on 28 January demonstrated clearly the maintenance of unauthorized weapons by Hizbullah, outside the control of the State, and Hizbullah's willingness to use such weapons against Israel. It confirmed the concern I have voiced for some time about the impact on Lebanon's stability and security. The presence of other armed extremist militants in Lebanon, as witnessed in Tripoli, Aarsal and the Bekaa is also deeply worrisome. Violence and terrorist acts continued during the reporting period, causing loss of life and great suffering and fear among many innocent Lebanese from all communities nationwide.

36. It is in the national interest of Lebanon to ensure that those behind the perpetration of terrorist acts, including political assassinations, are held accountable and that violence is not committed with impunity. It has been 10 years since the assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, and the adoption of resolution 1757 (2005). On 31 December 2014, the mandate of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon was extended for another three years from 1 March 2015.

37. Reports of groups in Lebanese communities carrying arms to protect themselves for fear of attack by such groups as the Nusra Front and ISIL, have continued in the reporting period. I emphasize the importance of having the Government of Lebanon ensure the security and stability of those areas, including in communities located close to the border, which would demonstrate the significance of the presence and role of State authorities, rather than militias, in that regard.

38. I have consistently highlighted the National Dialogue as the best way to deal with the issue of arms and achieve the ultimate goal of no weapons or armed forces in Lebanon other than those of the Lebanese State. I note that once again no sessions of the National Dialogue were held during the reporting period — another tangible effect of the continued vacuum in the presidency. I am concerned that this in turn puts at risk the possibility of building consensus and a unified vision on the issue.

39. During the reporting period, the security situation in the Palestinian refugee camps remained generally stable, with the exception of a few violent incidents. On 24 November, a Syrian refugee was killed during a clash between armed groups in Burj el Barajneh camp. The capacity of the Joint Security Force, which largely controls security in Ein el-Hillweh camp, has increased. In cooperation with Lebanese authorities, the Joint Security Force intervened on a number of occasions to prevent the further escalation of security incidents, including on 20 January when a Palestinian was killed in Ein el-Hillweh. I am encouraged by the launch of the Joint Security Force in Mieh Mieh camp on 26 March. I welcome the renewed commitment of Palestinian leaders to disassociate the Palestinian camps in Lebanon from the violence in the Syrian Arab Republic and the region more broadly.

40. Humanitarian conditions for Palestine refugees in Lebanon are increasingly dire, with the influx of an additional 45,000 refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic since the beginning of the crisis, placing tremendous additional pressure on the overall situation in the camps and gatherings and on the efforts of UNRWA to assist them. UNRWA has taken measures to reduce the tension between the Palestine refugees who have been residing in Lebanon and those arriving from the Syrian Arab Republic by, for example, including refugee children in regular classes in

UNRWA schools. The United Nations has continued to urge the Lebanese authorities to improve the living conditions of the refugees. Those efforts should be done without prejudice to the eventual resolution of the Palestine refugee question in the context of a comprehensive peace agreement in the region, and bearing in mind the detrimental effects of the dismal living conditions on the wider security situation.

41. The presence of Palestinian armed groups outside the camps continues to challenge the ability of Lebanon to exercise full sovereignty over its territory. Notwithstanding the decision taken in 2006 by the National Dialogue and confirmed in subsequent sessions, no progress was made during the reporting period with regard to dismantling the military bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada in the country. All but one of the bases are located along the Syrian-Lebanese border. Their presence continues to undermine Lebanese sovereignty and governmental authority and makes delineation of the border more difficult. It poses a serious challenge to the effective control of the eastern border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. I have reiterated my calls upon the Lebanese authorities for the implementation of earlier decisions of the National Dialogue, specifically those relating to the dismantling of the above-mentioned military bases, and upon the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate with those efforts in good faith.

III. Observations

42. I continue to be disappointed at the lack of further tangible progress made towards the implementation of the remaining provisions of resolution 1559 (2004). Lebanon continues to face challenges to its stability and security, both internally and along its borders with the Syrian Arab Republic, including from terrorism and extremist groups and arms smuggling. I am concerned that the continued stagnation in the implementation of the resolution could lead to the erosion of provisions already implemented and contribute to a further deterioration in the stability of Lebanon. I reiterate my firm conviction that it is in the best interest of Lebanon and the Lebanese to make progress towards the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) for the long-term stability of the country and the region.

43. I remain deeply concerned over the serious deterioration in January of the security situation in southern Lebanon. I condemn the violence committed by all sides and call upon all concerned to exercise maximum calm and restraint, to refrain from any action that could undermine the stability of the area and to act responsibly to prevent any escalation in an already tense regional environment. I call upon all sides to adhere to all relevant Security Council resolutions and condemn the tragic death of a United Nations peacekeeper.

44. I have repeatedly cautioned that the widespread proliferation of weapons outside the control of the State, combined with the existence of heavily armed militias, undermines the security of Lebanese citizens. The maintenance by Hizbullah of sizeable and sophisticated military capabilities outside the control of the Government of Lebanon remains a matter of grave concern, in particular because it creates an atmosphere of intimidation and represents a key challenge to the safety of Lebanese civilians and to the Government monopoly on the legitimate use of force. The serious impact of those arms was clearly felt during the reporting period, especially in the context of the incidents of 28 January. I reiterate my call

upon Hizbullah and all other parties concerned not to engage in any militant activity inside or outside Lebanon, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004).

45. I have repeatedly condemned the continued violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon, including cross-border incidents in which civilians and members of the national armed forces have been killed or injured on the Lebanese side of the border because of the actions of warring parties in the Syrian Arab Republic. I condemn the continuation of cross-border shelling and rocket attacks by various groups in the Syrian Arab Republic and the air raids by the Syrian air force on Lebanese territory, which are a further violation of Lebanese sovereignty. I continue to call upon all parties, including the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1559 (2004).

46. I condemn the participation of Lebanese citizens in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic in breach of the commitment of all Lebanese parties consistent with the ministerial declaration of the current Government, to the policy of disassociation and the principles of the Baabda Declaration agreed to by all Lebanese parties in June 2012. The involvement of Hizbullah and other Lebanese elements in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic seriously jeopardizes the security and stability of Lebanon. I welcome the continued commitment of the Prime Minister to Lebanon's policy of disassociation, but remain deeply concerned about the ongoing threat to Lebanon posed by terrorism and extremism, including from groups such as ISIL and the Nusra Front. I deplore the terrorist attacks that have occurred in the country, including those carried out by groups involved in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic. The suicide attacks that took place in Tripoli on 10 January led to a tragic loss of life and risked setting one Lebanese community against another as a result. However, I applaud the response of the various communities involved, especially those from the area of Jabal Mohsen, which refused to retaliate or respond to such violence. I encourage the Government of Lebanon and local leaders to facilitate and support the efforts of Lebanese communities working towards strengthening ties, including the development of socioeconomic opportunities for the most vulnerable citizens. Working in such a spirit of moderation and unity will, I hope, bring the various communities in Lebanon together and contribute to the country's strength and resilience.

47. I am encouraged by the successes of the Lebanese State, specifically the national armed forces, in strengthening its presence in border areas, in order to better protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. The positive impact of the deployment of border regiments has been felt across Lebanon, especially in the communities most affected by and vulnerable to attack from extremist armed groups attempting to infiltrate Lebanon's borders, such as the Nusra Front and ISIL. I regret that the deployments have not been without cost, including the loss of life of Lebanese soldiers. I condemn the detention and deplorable executions of Lebanese soldiers and security force personnel held captive by the Nusra Front and ISIL in the eastern Lebanese-Syrian border area. I call upon those holding the remaining security personnel hostage to release them without further delay.

48. I welcome the cooperation between the various State security agencies and the armed forces, which has led to the detention and arrest of a number of extremists

and criminals, particularly in Tripoli and the Bekaa area where specific security plans have been implemented. Their roles, including in counter-terrorism efforts, have been critical in preserving Lebanon's security and stability in the face of multiple challenges. I note the dialogues that have been held between opposing political parties in Lebanon and welcome all attempts to deepen unity and political consensus throughout the country. Dialogue and unity are the best response to any attempts at dividing and destabilizing Lebanese society, and I encourage the parties concerned to continue such efforts in the interest of all communities. Broad political support for the various security operations, including subsequent judicial processes, also sends an important message that violence with impunity will not be tolerated. I note the commitment of the former President of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, Judge David Baragwanath, to completing the current trial within the Tribunal's recently renewed third mandate, on the tenth anniversary of the assassination of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafiq Hariri, and 21 others who were killed in the same attack.

49. There is growing fear in Lebanon about the incursion of armed militants and terrorists across the border from the Syrian Arab Republic, including ISIL and the Nusra Front. Continued reports of the formation of armed groups in local communities close to those border areas, with the alleged aim of providing protection to the local population, are worrisome.

50. I continue to urge the Government and armed forces of Lebanon to take all measures necessary to prohibit Hizbullah and other armed groups from acquiring weapons and building paramilitary capacity outside the authority of the State, in violation of resolution 1559 (2004). It is vital that the National Dialogue meet again to address issues of national importance, including the arms held by Hizbullah and other groups. The discussion paper on a national defence strategy developed in the context of the National Dialogue remains a valuable starting point in that regard. It remains important that earlier decisions of the National Dialogue be implemented. I also call upon countries in the region that maintain close ties with Hizbullah to encourage the transformation of the armed group into a solely political party and its disarmament, in accordance with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004), in the best interests of Lebanon and regional peace and security.

51. I welcome the support provided by the international community for the national armed forces and security agencies. Bilateral assistance has also played an important part in providing timely and urgently needed requirements. The finalization of the agreement for $3 billion of assistance from Saudi Arabia, to be delivered in cooperation with France, is a positive development and will contribute to the strengthening of the armed forces. Another positive development is the additional $1 billion contribution from Saudi Arabia to strengthen Lebanese security services. I encourage progress in expediting the delivery of this much-needed capability, particularly in counter-terrorism and border protection, in order to give the armed forces the superiority needed to effectively address the multiple security challenges facing Lebanon.

52. The situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and the limited resources available to UNRWA to assist them remains a concern, particularly in the light of the continued presence of Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic who have fled the violence there. I call upon donors to increase their support to UNRWA

and its vital work in providing services to Palestine refugees in Lebanon. I note the work of the Palestinian joint security force in preventing an escalation of conflict on several occasions in the Ein el-Hillweh camp and welcome the renewed commitment of Palestinian leaders to disassociate the Palestinian camps in Lebanon from the violence in the Syrian Arab Republic and the region more broadly.

53. I regret the absence of any progress on the delineation and demarcation of the border with the Syrian Arab Republic, which has a significant impact on border control. I remain of the view that integrated border management will, in the longer term, contribute significantly to better control of the borders of Lebanon and help to prevent the illegal transfer of weapons and fighters in both directions. This has become even more pressing in the context of events in the Syrian Arab Republic.

54. The continued violations committed by Israel in respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, including the conspicuous overflights of Lebanese territory by Israeli military aircraft, are deplorable. I reiterate my call upon Israel to adhere to its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions and to withdraw its forces from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, as well as to cease its overflights of Lebanese airspace, which undermine the credibility of the Lebanese security services and generate anxiety among the civilian population. Recent incidents along the Blue Line, as detailed in my reports on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), underscore the importance of ensuring that the situation along the entirety of the Blue Line remains stable, including in the Shaba'a Farms area. I welcome the resumption of calm and the recommitment by both Lebanon and Israel to the cessation of hostilities, and call upon all sides to avoid any provocative rhetoric. Full implementation of all provisions of relevant resolutions remains the best prevention against the risk of miscalculation or tensions.

55. I am concerned at the continued failure, for almost a full year, to elect a new president, which puts additional pressure on the remaining State institutions, including the Cabinet. Leaving the position of Head of State vacant increases the country's vulnerability to mounting security, economic and humanitarian challenges. I commend the efforts of the Prime Minister and the Government to ensure national unity and the continuity of State institutions. Lebanon cannot afford to wait for a new crisis in order to resolve the anomaly, and I hope that Lebanese leaders will use the opportunity of the current relative stability to put the national interest ahead of partisan politics with regard to the election. I note that a parliamentary quorum was observed on 5 November, when Lebanese politicians met to extend the mandate of the Parliament until June 2017. I therefore call upon Lebanese members of Parliament to exercise their responsibility by attending sessions of the Parliament and ensuring that a quorum is observed so that a new president can be elected without further delay. The Lebanese people deserve to have a Head of State to help contribute to unity and stability in the country and to tackle long-term issues that have a tangible impact on all Lebanese.

56. Recent security developments, especially in the eastern border region, have put even greater pressure on the refugees, the host communities that receive them and the country, necessitating further support from the international community. I welcome the launching of the crisis response plan, jointly developed by the Government and the United Nations. I encourage the Lebanese authorities to continue to work closely with the United Nations in their efforts to host, assist and

protect refugees in accordance with human rights and humanitarian principles. The refugee crisis in Lebanon is not only a major humanitarian and socioeconomic burden for Lebanon but also a challenge to the country's stability and must be addressed as such. I strongly encourage Member States, including regional donors, to fulfil their burden-sharing responsibilities by contributing generously through the crisis response plan and the other mechanisms addressed at the Kuwait donor conference held on 31 March 2015.

57. Developments in the region make for an even more complex and fragile environment in which Lebanon's security, stability and unity remain key elements, and I remain firmly committed to the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004). I therefore count on the continued commitment of the Government to its international obligations and call upon all parties and actors to fully abide by resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). I also call upon Member States to renew efforts to support Lebanon in ensuring respect for its obligations under those resolutions as the best way to advance the country's long-term prosperity and stability as a democratic State. I will continue my efforts towards the full implementation of those and all other resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.